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SUBJECT: THE FDLR -- READY TO FOLD IF PUSHED HARD ENOUGH?

Classified By: Ambassador Michael R. Arietti, reason 1.4 (B/D)

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¶1. (C) Summary. In a two-hour briefing before senior GOR military and civilian officials and representatives of the local diplomatic corps, MDRP researchers (hired by the Multi-lateral Demobilization and Reintegration Program) presented detailed information and analysis based upon months of field investigation of the FDLR in North and South Kivu. The researcher argued forcefully that the FDLR although still well-organized, in control of up to 50 percent of the two provinces, and led by hard-line leaders who exercise harsh discipline to maintain their positions, is in fact weakened and ready to split and dissolve if organized and concerted pressure is brought to bear. Missing from his analysis, as he openly acknowledged, is exactly how this pressure is brought to bear, given present conditions in the Kivus, and the relative strength, mission and capacity of opposing forces -- MONUC, FARDC, and neighboring nations' forces. End summary.

¶2. (C) MDRP researcher Hans Romkema, a long-time resident of the region, and a Congolese colleague on June 20 presented a detailed overview and analysis of the FDLR in North and South Kivu to an attentive audience that included Ambassador Richard Sezibera, Brigadier General Richard Rutatina, Secretary General of Internal Security Ambassador Joseph

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Mutaboba, other GOR officials, and members of the diplomatic corps. Romkema offered extensive remarks on the composition and position of FDLR formations, including maps, organigrams and force numbers at brigade level and below. According to Romkema, the FDLR exclusively controls large swaths of the interiors of both provinces, and exercises "strong influence" over other territories, comprising altogether approximately fifty percent of the territory of each province. He sketched an organization characterized by regularized administrative routines, iron discipline (including brutal punishment -- death for officers -- for any who attempt to desert), and in control of sufficient resources and transportation routes to keep itself in the field and adequately armed and trained for the foreseeable future. "It functions like a real army," he told polchief in a following conversation. "Soldiers go on leave, they retire, they get assigned to training courses."

¶3. (C) However, Romkema also presented an organization that is slowly shrinking in size, has lost its previous regional patrons, and is subject to dissension, sinking morale, and a growing internal questioning of its purpose. While most observers have concluded for some time that the overwhelming

majority of FDLR members would leave if allowed to do so, Romkema posits a leadership structure that is also crumbling -- although in a manner peculiar to the FDLR, as moderate leaders "withdraw" and extremists increasingly take on directing roles. Each group, in fact, looks for ways to leave the forest -- "moderates" by returning to Rwanda, or simply disappearing into the DRC's vast spaces, and extremists by secretly planning their own well-funded escapes to other countries under assumed identities.

¶4. (C) From an estimated 15,00 to 20,000 troops as late as 2003, Romkema put FDLR numbers at a conventionally accepted 7000 soldiers, including 200-300 hard-line officers. Additionally, he estimated approximately 50,000 loyal civilian supporters, including several thousand of whom had been armed and trained to some degree. All three groups, extremist leaders, rank-and-file, and civilian supporters, are in varying degrees recipients and/or supporters of three sharply conflicting policy objectives: peace, genocide, escape.

¶5. (C) For the outside world, said Romkema the FDLR leadership attempts to project the image of an organization interested in negotiation, compromise, and, ultimately, a peaceful return to Rwanda. Internally, for the rank and file and civilian supporters, the FDLR leadership proclaims its goals remain the eradication of the Kagame regime and the institution of a Hutu Power government in Rwanda. According to Romkema, the rank and file are largely unfamiliar with the "official" policy line of the FDLR, and know only this internal message -- war, conquest, a return to genocide. Thirdly, says Romkema, the innermost leadership clique, those directly implicated in the 1994 genocide, work assiduously to amass personal fortunes (as do all the military leaders), and prepare for the day when they must flee the forest and seek new lives under new identities. This last objective is masked by continuing planning for military operations against the GOR, as a means of retaining the loyalty and discipline of the rank and file.

¶6. (C) The MDRP researchers suggest that, given its internal conflicts and slowly shrinking military force, the FDLR could disintegrate, if confronted with sufficiently robust and convincing military pressure on a broad front. The researchers drew a distinction between outright military assault on the FDLR, and the bringing to bear of military "demonstrations" of compellingly large size and coordination. Extremist leadership, without alternative, would flee to third countries; moderate leadership would opt for a return to Rwanda or a comfortable exile in the DRC; rank and file and civilians would either return to Rwanda, or continue to live where they find themselves. Any such military confrontation, the researchers acknowledged, would require extensive efforts to protect local populations as the FDLR collapsed and fled.

¶7. (C) The MDRP researchers freely conceded that no military force present today in the DRC could alone effect such a confrontation with the FDLR. MONUC lacked the proper mandate; the FARDC was operationally incapable, and at least partially compromised from extensive "cohabitation" with the FDLR; and the participation of other nation's militaries, including Rwanda's, was politically unpalatable for the GODRC and unlikely in the near-term. They suggested as alternatives a "last chance" revival of the March 2005 Rome Declaration process for the peaceful repatriation of the FDLR; an enhanced and individualized appeal to targeted FDLR leadership to encourage their return; and the search for a "temporary solution" for the 200-300 core extremists -- perhaps a short-term refuge in a third country, followed by undefined legal "measures."

¶8. (C) Rwanda officials at the briefing expressed broad agreement with the MDRP analysis of the FDLR, while expressing weariness with the recommendations. "We have heard this all before," said Ambassador Sezibera and several others. When Romkema replied that the FDLR planned an unprecedented meeting of all senior commanders the week of

June 25 to consider the FDLR's future, the GOR officials minimized the meeting's importance, saying, "they have these meetings from time to time." The GOR officials in the room were uniform on one point: the need for the international community to "get serious" in assisting the governments of the region to finally deal with the FDLR.

19. (C) Comment. Despite the theoretical brittleness of the FDLR, its waning numbers, wavering commitment to its original (genocidal) goals, and growing division within its ranks, for many observers it still remains the most effective military formation in the Kivus. The lack of a capable countering force suggests it may endure for some time to come. Multilateral diplomatic efforts such as the USG's Tripartite-Plus meetings are accepted by the Rwandans as useful but limited tools for dealing with the FDLR. Without explaining exactly how it is to happen, they want "action" now. End comment.

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